

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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USIA-15 EB-11 NEA-10 SY-10 USSS-00 A-01 IO-14 SCA-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4807

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 9346

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, AR, US

SUBJ: PERON SPEAKS ON TERRORISM AND FOREIGN COMPANIES

REF: BA 9171

1. SUMMARY: DURING DEC 20 PRESS CONFERENCE (WHICH EMBASSY ASSUMES DEPT HAS SEEN VIA FBIS), PERON INDICATED VIOLENCE WAS NOT A PROBLEM UNIQUE TO ARGENTINA. HE ALSO SAID GOVT WOULD PROTECT FOREIGN COMPANIES AND THAT SO LONG AS THEY OBEYED LAW, THEY WOULD BE CONSIDERED JUST AS ARGENTINE COMPANIES. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING WIDE-RANGING PRESS CONFERENCE, PERON SAID THAT VIOLENCE IS A WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON AND REFERRED TO STREET VIOLENCE IN NEW YORK AND RECENT MASSACRE AT ROME AIRPORT. SPEAKING OF VIOLENCE IN ARGENTINA, HE DIVIDED IT INTO TWO CLASSES: COMMON CRIME AND IDEOLOGICAL CRIME. THE LATTER, HE SAID, ORIGINATED IN 1968 AFTER THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN PARIS. HE SAID ANY IDEOLOGY, INCLUDING COMMUNISM, WHICH OPERATED WITHIN THE LAW WILL BE TOLERATED IN ARGENTINA, BUT THAT VIOLENCE WILL BE COMBATED THROUGH THE POLICE AND THE INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY SYSTEM. THE GOVT, HE SAID, WILL NOT RESORT TO FIGHTING TERROR WITH TERROR. (COMMENT: THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE, NONETHELESS, THAT GOVT IS DOING JUST THAT.)

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3. IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE, AT LEAST IN PART, RESPONSE TO NEED SUGGESTED BY AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN HERE TO ECONMIN GELBARD (SEE REFTEL) AND BY DEPT TO AMB ORFILA, PERON IMPLIED THAT FOREIGN BUSINESSES WERE MAKING POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMY AND MUST BE PROTECTED. REFERRING TO CUBAN TRADE ISSUE, HE SAID SOME COMPANIES HAD BALKED AT FIRST BUT HAD THEN COME AROUND TO QUOTING PRICES IN THIS IMPORTANT EFFORT TO BOOST ARGENTINE EXPORTS. HE FOLLOWED*THIS WITH REFERENCE TO FACT THAT COMPANI*S ARE THREATENED BY TERRORISTS AND SAID: "WE ARE GOING TO PROTECT THEM. THAT IS THE MISSION AND THE DUTY OF THE STATE. WE ARE PROTECTING THEM AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO. WHILE THESE COMPANIES WORK WITHIN THE LAWS WHICH WE HAVE APPROVED, FOR US THEY ARE LIKE ARGENTINE COMPANIES. MANY OF THEM ARE ALREADY IN MIXED ENTERPRISES WITH THE STATE...I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT KEEPING THOSE FIRMS WHICH COOPERATE IN THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS A NEGATIVE FACTOR"--THE LATTER IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT ARGENTINE "ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE." HE ALSO SAID "WE DO NOT WANT TO PERSECUTE FOREIGN COMPANIES, WHETHER NORTH AMERICAN OR FROM SOME OTHER COUNTRY. WHAT WE WANT IS FOR THESE COMPANIES NOT TO DECAPITALIZE US NOR TO INTERFERE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS OF THE NATION THROUGH THE ECONOMIC POWER THEY REPRESENT... BUT TO WORK UNDER THE SAME CONDITIONS AS ALL THE OTHER COMPANIES."

4. REACTION OF AMERICAN BUSINESS COMMUNITY HERE IS MIXED. THEY WELCOME THIS AS A FIRST STEP, BUT HOPE FOR SOMETHING MORE. WHAT THEY WOULD WISH TO SEE IS A MAJOR PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT DIRECTED SPECIFICALLY TO FACT THAT TERRORIST ACTS AGAINST FOREIGN COMPANIES ARE HARMFUL TO NATIONAL ECONOMY, ALONG WITH MOBILIZATION OF PUBLIC OPINION TO REPUDIATE SUCH CRIMES AS SWINT KILLING AND UNABATED WAVE OF KIDNAPPINGS (E.G. PEUGEOT GENERAL MANAGER KIDNAPPED DEC 28). THEY ALSO FEEL THAT THEY ARE ONES BEING "DECAPITALIZED", AND THAT FAR FROM BEING SUBJECT TO SAME CONDITIONS AS ARGENTINE BUSINESS, THERE ARE INCREASING NUMBER DISCRIMINATORY MEASURES AFFECTING FOREIGN FIRMS. THEY SEE LITTLE PROSPECT OF NEW FOREIGN INVESTMENT, AND POSSIBLE DISINVESTMENT, UNLESS GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATES MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE, WHICH HAS YET TO BE FORTHCOMING FROM ECONMIN GELBARD OR ANY MEMBER OF HIS TEAM.

5. COMMENT: STATEMENT IS NOT WHAT WE MIGHT HAVE HOPED, BUT
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IT IS FIRST CLEAR AND POSITIVE REFERENCE TO ROLE OF FOREIGN ENTERPRISES AND IT DOES AGAIN EMPHASIZE THAT GOVT INTENDS TO PROTECT THEM. FACT IS, OF COURSE, THAT EVEN WITH BEST WILL IN WORLD, GOVT CANNOT GUARANTEE THEIR SAFETY, ANY MORE THAN POLICE IN NEW YORK OR WASHINGTON CAN GUARANTEE SAFETY OF FOREIGN DIPLOMATS THERE. PERHAPS PRINCIPAL SIGNIFICANCE OF STATEMENT IS THAT IT SUGGESTS PERON HAS BEEN RESPONSIVE TO PRODDINGS AND IS NOT CLOSED TO FURTHER SUGGESTIONS ON THIS MATTER. CON-

TINUED LOW-KEY REFERENCES TO TERRORIST PROBLEM IN CONVERSATIONS
BOTH IN WASHINGTON AND HERE WOULD SEEM ADVISABLE.
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